

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 28, 2006

For More Information Contact

VDH 06-44

Diane Powers, VDH Communications Director (804) 864-7008, (804) 840-1919

Kelly Lobanov, Associate Communications Director (804) 864-7553, (804) 659-3781

**STATE'S TOP HEALTH OFFICIALS TO OBSERVE CHRONIC DISEASE
PREVENTION EFFORTS IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA**

Editor's Note: In-person interviews must be scheduled in advance. To book time, please contact Diane Powers. Cameras welcome at RAM/MOM Dental and Vision Clinic.

(RICHMOND, VA)—Members of the Virginia Board of Health will join the State Health Commissioner and other state and local health officials on a site visit to the Lenowisco, Cumberland Plateau and Mount Rogers health districts located in southwest Virginia. The tour will include stops at area health departments and clinics and home visits with patients. The Board will also attend the Remote Area Medical (RAM)/Mission of Mercy (MOM) Dental and Vision Clinic in Wise County to observe clinic volunteers and meet with patients receiving services.

"Southwest Virginia still faces many public health challenges," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H. "Inadequate access to health care, poor nutrition and fitness habits, lack of clean water or safe sewage disposal, and other health disparities are cause for concern in this region. The RAM/MOM clinic is a prime example of how teamwork and innovation can positively impact the health of a community," said Stroube.

In April 2005, the State Board of Health formally announced that the prevention and control of chronic disease is its top priority. According to data from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, chronic diseases are among the most prevalent, costly and preventable of all health problems, comprising the leading causes of death and disability in the United States.

Heart disease, cancer and stroke are the top three leading causes of death in Virginia. However, chronic disease is not only life threatening, it can also severely damage quality of life and create significant health care costs for individuals and their families.

"People with chronic illness are health care's largest, most expensive and fastest growing group," said State Board of Health Chairman Jack O. Lanier, Dr. P.H. "Given the severe consequences for Virginia's economy and the quality of life of its residents, we cannot afford to ignore the threat posed by chronic disease," said Lanier.

Although chronic diseases are among the most common and costly health problems, they are also among the most preventable. Adopting healthy behaviors such as eating nutritious foods, being physically active and avoiding tobacco use can prevent or help control many of the devastating effects of chronic diseases.

(more)

Conditions can also be managed more effectively and with less serious consequences if they are detected early. VDH strongly recommends Virginians visit their health care provider regularly for physical examinations that include screening tests.

The Virginia Board of Health, which provides leadership in public health planning and policy development, consists of 13 members appointed by the Governor. Individual board members represent professions including medicine, nursing, dentistry, pharmacy and veterinary medicine, and also represent constituencies such as local government, hospitals, nursing homes, managed care health insurance plans, consumers and corporate purchasers of health care.

Visit www.vdh.virginia.gov and click on “Board of Health” to find more information about the Board’s chronic disease initiative and facts about public health needs in southwest Virginia. To learn about what Virginia is doing to address chronic disease prevention throughout the state, visit www.healthyvirginians.gov

###